"To promote understanding and appreciation of the religious and spiritual values which abide in the processes and relationships of agriculture and rural life; to define their significance and relate them to the Christian enterprise at home and abroad."

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CHRISTIAN IDEALISM AND THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT*

By E. R. Bowen

As I read the Scripture the injunction to the church is to complete the unfinished work of the Master which is described in Matthew 4: 23 as "preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing all manner of disease among the people." To this purpose was the church committed and for this purpose was the church organized among men.

Toyohiko Kagawa, who is described by John Haynes Holmes as "the noblest Christian in the world since the passing of Tolstoi," says:

"Throughout this land
I go to preach
The Kingdom is at hand."

Just how does Kagawa, in this "power age of potential plenty," interpret preaching "the Kingdom is at hand" and "healing all manner of disease among the people?" Over and over again he is repeating: "Whether you like it or not, there is no other way but the cooperatives."

Healing the Diseases of Society

As I interpret "preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing all manner of disease among the people," this Biblical injunction means that the followers of the principles of brotherhood must eventually eliminate all four of these diseases from the world. If I correctly read history, the church was primarily organized to heal the disease of selfishness among men by the gospel of unselfishness and brotherhood. However, in the course of history, the church found that it could not heal the disease of selfishness with the gospel of brotherhood because of the ignorance of the people, so the church started schools to heal the disease of ignorance. Then the church found it still impossible to apply the healing of brotherhood to the disease of selfishness because of the sickness of the people, so the church started hospitals to heal the disease of sickness. Today the church finds, again, that its message of brotherhood cannot heal the disease of selfishness, this time because of the poverty of the people. Will the church today help to heal the disease of economic poverty, as before it has helped to heal the diseases of mental ignorance and physical sickness?

Should the Church Do Anything?

The individual and the social gospel are sometimes discussed as though they can be separated. They are parts of the same whole as are the two sides of

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the same coin. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" joins each one of us inseparably to all our fellows.

Sir Wilfred Grenfell of Labrador says that "when we found that almost nine-tenths of our sickness in Labrador was due to food, the love of Christ had to be preached that way--you can grow a potato for the love of God as well as you can preach a sermon." A minister tells of a visit by a very earnest religious leader to a tenement home where the water had been turned off and dirty dishes covered the table and dirty clothes were heaped in a corner. As he left the home he said, "Well, sister, don't forget to pray and trust in the Lord and He'll take care of you all right." The answer was as simple and direct as it was deserved. "The Lord's all right. The trouble is with men. What we need right now is water. The Lord has provided it. Why don't you men turn it on?"

In New York City, at an ordination service, a new minister recently declared that he was going to "preach pure religion." Is it possible to preach pure religion today in any way except as applied to "healing all manner of disease among the people?"

The Four Great Economic Medicines Offered for the Healing of the Disease of Poverty

There are four great systems of economics being experimented with in the world today--Controlled Capitalism in America, Corporatism or Fascism in Italy and Germany, State Communism in Russia, Consumer - Producer Cooperation in Great Britain and Scandinavia. Which of these four is the kind of economic medicine for the healing of the disease of poverty which the church should help apply?

Capitalism, Corporatism and Communism Destroy Church

It should be clearly recognized by church leaders that any of the first three economic systems: Capitalism, Corporatism or Communism, which are being experimented with as possible cures for the healing of the disease of poverty, will eventually destroy the church. No one would question that Communism destroys the church. Likewise Corporatism takes away the democratic control over the church which in effect destroys it. It is not generally realized that Capitalism will likewise eventually destroy the church. Both statistical and individual illustrations prove this to be true. There is under Capitalism a constant increase in tenancy both on the farm and in the city. An increase in tenancy results in a decline in church membership. Ten years ago F. A. Grissette was telling a church world, then and still largely unawake to the threat of tenancy, that "the country church must in self-defense get busy with this problem of home and farm ownership. If the country church does not destroy farm tenancy, then farm tenancy will destroy the country church." It is equally true with urban as with rural churches that as we become more and more a nation of tenants and lose ownership of homes and farms through Capitalism, we in turn lose interest and eventually discontinue membership in the church which does not concern itself with this great disease of tenancy, which develops into the cancer of poverty.

I can speak first hand as to my own reactions. When it became necessary to lay off men with whom I had both worked and worshipped for years, I eventually revolted against walking with them to the altar of brotherhood to confess my sins of selfishness when I could not arise from the altar and go out and practice the principles of economic brotherhood toward them. Likewise, when later, I voluntarily resigned from business to think my way through to a final conclusion as to the economic cure for the disease of poverty among the people, I was treated by some as an eccentric, until finally I personally did not care to go to the altar with others who still retained their positions and incomes and seemed to care little about the poverty of others.

George W. Russell (AE) says that "the fading hold which the church has over the heavens is due to its lack of understanding of the economic basis of the spiritual life." A church which does not concern itself over the increase in tenancy among farmers and workers resulting from Capitalism, will and should die in America, along with a sinful economic system which will produce such social diseases--just as the church is dying in other countries where it did not oppose the evils of Capitalism and the coming of Corporatism and Communism. A priest from Spain gave this reason for the revolution there, "The church forgot the poor and finally the poor forgot the church." Forgotten men will finally forget the church which forgets them. The depression in religion is directly joined to the depression in economics.

Consumers' Cooperatives

Personally I believe I have found "the way, the truth and the life" in the system of economic brotherhood of Consumers' Cooperatives.

Consumers' Cooperatives attack the present capitalistic order at its Achilles heel--which is the market. Consumers control the market through their purchases. Dr. King, early pioneer of cooperation, urged labor in these words, "You are poor, you are weak; organize your purchasing power and you shall all be wealthy and strong." The power to change poverty into plenty lies in your own pocketbook as consumers.

After long years of experimentation to discover the permanent technique of organization, the Rochdale Pioneers, four score and ten years ago, in 1844, formulated the principles which have proved increasingly successful. Today one hundred million families in over forty countries of the world are organized into Consumers' Cooperative Associations which follow out these principles.

These pioneers of economic brotherhood had lost a strike as producers and had likewise become disillusioned as to their possible accomplishments politically under the Chartist Movement. They turned, in their desperation, to organization as Consumers and found the secret of immediate and increasing success in the cooperative ownership of a retail store. The future of mankind was tied up with that little dingy grocery store.

The church, where a number of them worshipped, became known as the Cooperative Chapel. They formulated three basic principles as their expression of economic brotherhood:

First, that since brotherhood means everybody, membership would be open to all, and each person would have one vote irrespective of the number of shares owned. Persons and not property would vote. Strict neutrality would be observed religiously, racially and politically.

Second, that since brotherhood means security rather than speculation, shares would receive only a limited rate of interest and would not receive any profits.

Third, since brotherhood means just distribution of income and ownership of wealth, profits or savings would be paid back to the consumer-owners on the basis of their purchases or used for social purposes, as they themselves decided by democratic vote.

From the single Rochdale store in Toad Lane, the Consumers' Cooperative Movement has grown until today 7,200,000 families, or over half of the families of

Great Britain, are members. A retail business of a billion dollars and a wholesale business of five hundred million dollars are done. Their banking division has a total yearly turnover of over three billion dollars. They own one hundred and fifty factories where they produce pure food and goods for themselves without priva profit and pay trade union wages. Their insurance department receives annual premiums of over twenty-five million dollars.

From Great Britain the Movement has spread to other countries. Denmark is called a Cooperative Com monwealth. In Sweden the Cooperatives are called the "trust busters." In Finland over half the people belo to the Cooperatives, which is one reason why Finland is not inclined to go Communistic. Czechoslovakia is known as the "island of democracy in a sea of autocracy" because of having adopted the Folk School System fo the education of the people and the Cooperative Movement as their economic organization. Twenty-five millio people in Japan are members of Cooperatives which Kagawa calls "the economic foundation of world peace." Ch leaders have taken prominent parts in the development of the Cooperative Movement in these countries.

Consumers' Cooperation in the United States

We have been individualistic exploiters in America because of our vast natural resources. Now we reached the Pacific Ocean in our expansion and have begun to double back on ourselves. It is not unlikely t the 1930's will go down in history as the "hungry 30's" in America, as have the "hungry 40's" of nearly a ce tury ago in Great Britain.

After many false starts, the farmers in America finally reached sufficiently near to the poverty stage after the close of the war to begin to act cooperatively. First they organized marketing and then pur chasing, credit and production cooperatives. Four principal lines have been followed: feed, seed and ferti lizer in the East; petroleum products in the Middle West; fire, automobile and life insurances; home supplie such as groceries and dry goods. Cooperative Purchasing or Consumers' Cooperation among farmers has doubled from 125 to 250 millions of dollars during the past five years. Savings of over four million dollars have b made during the past year. The Cooperative Movement has proven, as described by Vaino Tanner of Finland, Pr dent of the International Cooperative Alliance, a "veritable Noah's Ark of the depression."

Because the depression did not affect city residents until 1929, as it did the farmers since 1920, because of the lesser degree of neighborhood spirit among city people, the cooperative movement has been slo to take hold in cities. Now, however, during the past two years combination Cooperative Discussion, Recrea and Buying Clubs have sprung up in vast numbers, some of which have already progressed into permanently orga ized cooperative stores and oil stations.

It is not necessary to discuss these developments here in detail as they are covered in other lite ture. The Kingdom of Heaven has been growing up quietly all around us in the organization of Cooperatives. their significance is beginning to be recognized generally by church leaders. America, too, has had its Co- operative Prophets among church leaders.

Will the Church Lead Out Today?

Do you accept the fact that "religion that does not take an active part in the economic struggle not worth having?" Do you believe that a "minister must become a battling economist?" If you do, then the operative Movement offers you a technique for action. As Rev. Walter Schlaretzki says, "The Cooperative Mo ment provides the technique of brotherhood--the church should provide the dynamics of brotherhood." Kagawa clares that his primary mission in coming to America is to help bring these two groups together "to the end the Cooperatives become Christian and the Churches become Cooperative."

Sir Wilfred Grenfell, famous missionary to Labrador, says that the difficulty with us in America that we think in terms of solving world problems, then national problems, then state problems, then village problems--while the order should be reversed--that the first problem to be solved is in the village. The L beth Council of Anglican Bishops declared in 1897 that "a Christian community as a whole is morally respons for the character of its own economic and social order."

What we need to do is to rebuild every village into a Cooperative Community Beautiful. (Large ci are only a collection of small villages put together and pushed up into the air.) The church should keep a tion fixed, as Charles Lyon Seasholes pointed out at the Federal Council Seminar on Consumers' Cooperation, upon the building of a better community, thus forcing any opposition to meet the church at constantly highe levels and on its own terms. Every business and bank should be reorganized into a Consumers' Cooperative A ciation. Cooperative retail associations should then organize into wholesales and, in turn, into manufactu

Having been born on a farm, then having worked in a retail store and elevator and later in a fact and office, I would appeal to you to help release the chains of greed that bind those of us whose lives are directly a part of this present economic system. I have always envied my friends who became preachers, pro fessors and physicians, because they were professionals. A professional, to me, is one who serves society first of all. A preacher's job is to eliminate selfishness and he gives his life to that end. A professor job is to eliminate ignorance and he gives his life to that end. A physician's job is to eliminate sickne and he gives his life to that end--all with little thought of material compensation. The purpose of busine and banking should be to eliminate poverty, but a business man is supposed to line his own pockets, irrespe tive of the fact that in so doing he increases rather than eliminates poverty. I would appeal to you to pr and teach to the end that business and banking can be carried on for the service of all and not for the pro of a few--help to release the haves as well as the have-nots--the possessors as well as the dispossessed. enthrone service instead of greed as the motive and purpose of our economic system--help build a system of economic brotherhood through organizing Cooperatives.